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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KV](#) [UNMIK](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIAN GOVERNMENT APPROACH IN KOSOVO
UNCHANGED UNDER NEW ADMINISTRATION

Classified By: Ambassador Tina S. Kaidanow for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) Summary: From the Kosovo vantage point, and despite the good signals sent by Belgrade on ICTY and other matters, the new Serbian government policy towards Kosovo appears unchanged from that of the previous Kostunica administration. Serbian Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanovic has endorsed the uninhibited functioning of parallel Serb municipal governments, and some of them (in Strpce and Mitrovica) have indicated that they fully intend to "govern" as they see fit, despite the potential for open conflict with ethnic Albanians in those locales. We have received persistent reports that previously-appointed Serbian government municipal coordinators (CCK officials) may soon be replaced by parallel municipal officials elected illicitly on May 11. It also remains clear that short of a major policy change in Belgrade, Serbs in Kosovo will be permitted no contact with ICO or EULEX. There have been rhetorical indications from Kosovo Ministry State Secretary Oliver Ivanovic that certain hardline leaders in northern Kosovo may be dismissed from Serbian government-funded jobs and prosecuted for corruption starting in September, but these hardliners continue to function unimpeded for the time being. UN SRSG Zannier also confirmed to the Ambassador July 30 that there had been no sign of flexibility or a new approach to Kosovo from Belgrade in his talks with Serbian officials on customs, the police and the judiciary. End Summary.

Serbian Strategy: More of the Same

12. (C) The Serbian Ministry for Kosovo appears to be closely following previous government policy in supporting parallel governments in Serb-majority areas. On July 18, Serbian Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanovic, who is a Kosovo Serb from the northern village of Leshak (Leposavic municipality), made his first official trip to Kosovo, visiting Gracanica and Mitrovica. Bogdanovic visited newly-elected (parallel) mayors in both locations. Serbian government Coordination Center (CCK) Regional Coordinator Goran Arsic, a fellow member of Bogdanovic's Democratic Party (DS), helped organize the Minister's visit to Gracanica and reported to us on July 21 that Bogdanovic made clear he would support only the parallel mayors and no one else (i.e., mayors elected via UNMIK-organized polls). In addition, while Bogdanovic claims to have talked to the parallel mayor of Strpce, Zvonko Mihajlovic, and warned him to avoid "provocative action,"

the Kosovo Ministry has not made any visible moves to restrain the parallel government there, which is occupying the legal municipal building. Parallel mayor Mihajlovic boasted to the Serb press on July 29 that he would "use his authority" to take action against illegal (Albanian) construction in Strpce if UNMIK would not do so itself.

Parallel Governments Empowered

13. (C) The situation involving the American Corner in Mitrovica is another example of a parallel government's attempt to assume control of municipal functions. Serbian government-funded parallel library staff have warned the librarian at the UNMIK-funded (and USG renovated) library, which houses a USG-supported American Corner, that they will assume control over the UNMIK building and shut down the American Corner by the end of August. They have done this with the knowledge and backing of the parallel mayor of Mitrovica, Milorad Toplicevic. The Ambassador spoke with Oliver Ivanovic by phone on July 29 and 30 to protest such action; he assured her that he and Bogdanovic would seek to prevent the takeover and keep the American Corner functioning. However, the solution he offered was to put the UNMIK librarians under the control of the Belgrade system to give them "political cover" instead of merely preventing the takeover by other means.

14. (C) It is not clear that the Ministry for Kosovo intends to exercise tighter control over the parallel municipal governments, which are almost entirely dominated by Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)

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members who are political opponents of the Democratic Party (DS), which leads the new Serbian government. On July 3, prior to being confirmed in his current position, Oliver Ivanovic claimed that the parallel municipal councils would be reduced in size and composed both of the Ministry's appointees (from the DS party) and those elected in the May 11 parallel polls. As reported above, however, the parallel governments have now been confirmed in their current composition. Additionally, we have heard repeated assertions that CCK municipal-level coordinators, who have until now been appointed by Belgrade, would be replaced by parallel municipal officials. This idea was originally proposed by the previous Minister for Kosovo (Slobodan Samardzic), prior to the May 11 elections. On July 30, Vesna Jovanovic, a moderate from Partes (Gjilan/Gnjilane municipality), said that this was indeed the plan but that no official decision had yet been made. Many of the municipal-level coordinators who will presumably lose their positions in such a transition are members of the Serbian governing coalition's DS and G-17 Plus parties.

No to EULEX

15. (C) It appears that another policy from the previous government - no contact with the ICO and EULEX - will continue to be followed. We have consistently heard the same line from Ivanovic and hardliner Nebojsa Jovic, a leader in the Serb National Council (SNC) North, who told us on July 18 that contact with ICO/EULEX would be impossible, along with EULEX's deployment in the north, without a UNSC Resolution. Ivanovic went on to say that he would consider it "a success" if his government instructed him to officially contact the ICO or EULEX to discuss something, but that his hands would be tied until that happened. The policy of giving EULEX the cold shoulder appears to emanate directly from Belgrade and the Serbian Foreign Ministry; in contrast, local Serbs, particularly in the enclaves, quietly express their fear of a policing vacuum should UNMIK reconfigure and EULEX fail to deploy successfully. Outspoken moderate Serb Rada Trajkovic went so far as to tell Radio Free Europe that EULEX would benefit the Serb community more than the Albanians, and that they would readily accept EULEX if Belgrade so permitted.

No Action Against Northern Hardliners

¶6. (C) To date, despite persistent rumors that hardliners such as Marko Jaksic, director of the Serbian government-funded hospital in northern Mitrovica, had lost his job, we have not confirmed any significant personnel changes or firings in northern Kosovo. At a July 15 meeting, Kosovo Police Service (KPS) Lt. Colonel Ergin Medic (a half-Serb, half-Bosniak from north Mitrovica), told poloffs that he did not think things would change quickly. Oliver Ivanovic has asserted to us that a "housecleaning" will take place starting in September, but even reputed MUP head Delibasic, reported to have been recalled to Belgrade, was again spotted in Mitrovica, casting doubt on the determination and ability of the new government to control the hardliners.

SRSZ Zannier: No Sign of Flexibility on Key Issues from Belgrade

¶7. (C) UN SRSZ Zannier also reported to the Ambassador and other Contact Group representatives that Belgrade officials had shown no flexibility or signs of a new approach in his discussions with them on key issues for stability in Kosovo. Zannier met with Serbian FM Jeremic and Kosovo Minister Bogdanovic in Belgrade and then subsequently with Bogdanovic in Pristina on July 30. Zannier reported no substantive difference in position between the new Serbian government and the old; the new Belgrade officials flatly rejected the reestablishment of customs on the Kosovo-Serbia border; opposed Zannier's proposal to open the north Mitrovica court with UNMIK-appointed international judges and prosecutors (warning that any such approach would trigger another March

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17-like explosion and that UNMIK must accept Serbian judges and court officials); and would only countenance returning Kosovo Serbs to the police force in the enclaves if they reported directly to UNMIK. Zannier replied that he could not turn the clock back on police and that there was no basis for discussion on these terms, but that he would be happy to keep the door open to technical talks if there was any movement on the Serbian side. He asked when the Serbian officials might want to meet with him again; clearly feeling no urgency, they suggested later in September.

Comment

¶8. (C) The pattern of Serbian behavior in Kosovo since the advent of the Tadic administration unfortunately gives little reason for immediate hope that the more productive policies Belgrade has pursued on ICTY and other issues will be followed in Kosovo. Quite the contrary, Tadic's people -- and it seems from here that FM Jeremic is driving the train on Kosovo -- appear to see a hard policy line on Kosovo as domestic insurance that they can take a more progressive tack on other Europe-related issues without losing their nationalist credentials. The disinclination that Jeremic and Bogdanovic have shown to engage more seriously in discussions with UNMIK indicates that the current course of Serbia's Kosovo policy is likely to remain in place at least until after the Serbian government refers the Kosovo independence question to the International Court of Justice, as they now appear set on doing. Whether they will then feel themselves freer to be flexible in Kosovo is an open question, but they are putting in place facts on the ground that will make any subsequent change very difficult. End Comment.

KAIDANOW